

**Interviewee: Earl Joswick**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Date of interview: 14 June 2004**

**Location: Thomas Saylor's office at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN**

**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, August 2004**

**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, October 2004**

Earl Joswick was born 25 October 1923 in Minneapolis, one of four children, but grew up in the small town of Deephaven, Minnesota, where he graduated from high school in 1942. He entered the US Army Air Corps in November 1942.

Earl was trained as a ball turret gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bombers. He was assigned to 334<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and in November 1943 sent to England. He completed thirteen missions before his B-17 was shot down on 19 July 1944 while on a raid to Schweinfurt, Germany.

As a POW, Earl was initially at the Dulag Luft interrogation facility, then at Stalag Luft IV (July 1944 – February 1945). When this camp was evacuated in February 1945, with Soviet troops nearby, the prisoners were marched through central Germany for eighty-six days (nearly five hundred miles) until liberated on 28 April by US forces near the city of Bitterfeld.

Once evacuated from that area, Earl was returned the United States; he was discharged later in 1945. Again a civilian, Earl was married in 1946 (wife Florence) and worked for thirty years as an auto mechanic for Ford. He was active many years in the American Ex-POWs organization, serving as Minnesota state commander.



**Interview Key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**E = Earl Joswick**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is the Monday, 14 June 2004, and this is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm interviewing Mr. Earl Joswick of Plymouth, Minnesota. This interview is taking place at my office here at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. First, on the record, Earl, thanks very much for taking time today to come down and talk with me. Thanks very much.

E: You're welcome.

T: For the record, I want to put some information in, and please correct me if any of this is not correct. You were born on 25 October 1923 in Minneapolis but you grew up and graduated from high school in Deephaven, Minnesota. Deephaven High School class of 1942. Later in 1942 you volunteered for the Army Air Corps and by late 1943 were serving with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 334<sup>th</sup> Squadron as a ball turret gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft. You were stationed in England and flew missions until your fourteenth mission on 19 July 1944, the date which your plane was shot down over Germany. I want to begin by asking about that particular day, Earl, 19 July 1944. Was there anything on that particular mission as you got ready and took off that suggested it would be any different than any of the other missions you'd been on?

E: No. I don't think so. I think we were all gung-ho. I mean, we were young guys and we were all flying and figured well, there's no tomorrow. Let's do it today. And we did it. But we were full of vigor and vitality then. Comparing to what we are today.

T: You were not quite twenty-two years old, so it is a little different, isn't it?

E: That's right. That's right.

T: You were a ball turret gunner.

E: Yes.

T: What does the mission look like from the perspective of a ball turret gunner?

E: A lot of people always thought that it was a rough place to be.

T: Is that not the case either? You don't think.

E: No. I don't think so, because I think it was practically the safest part of the plane. Nine times out of ten they always came down from the top.

T: Fighter planes.

E: Yes. Fighter planes came down from the top. The big, our big deal was, is our shrapnel. I got wheeled out of the ball turret twice on account of shrapnel hit. They took out the controls so I have to be wheeled out. They'd crank me out and then I'd get out and things like that. But that was the big thing. They always thought it was unsafe down there. We were by ourselves. It was kind of a lonely spot. You could see just about everything. And it was clear. But the thing was your top turret and your copilot and your pilot were probably the worst part of the plane because they'd go and turn around and they'd always come down for them. It seemed like. They hardly ever came up from the bottom and shot at you from the bottom.

T: So flak was more of a concern for you as a ball turret gunner.

E: That's right. Flak was. The day we got shot down, the flak caught us.

T: Describe what happened on that mission. You'd flown thirteen missions successfully until now. The plane being shot down. How did you experience that from your perspective?

E: Well, the thing was is you...I mean, we were actually paratroopers because we turned around and we all...the pilot says it's time to go. We all went out. All except the pilot and the copilot, [they] stayed with the plane. They probably went about another sixty miles because they stayed with the plane. But we had everything shot out except one engine.

**(1, A, 48)**

T: I see. How far ahead of time could you tell that something was wrong? Something serious was wrong.

E: It seems to happen all at once. You think you're going [to make it], regardless if you're hit or anything. You're always going to make it.

T: Did you really think that?

E: Yes. You always think you're going to make it. But it was just like we were when we got hit. Flak was so heavy that you practically could walk in it. I mean, it was so heavy that day. So we turned around and we were heading west.

T: Away from the target.

E: Away from the target. But the thing was, we thought we were in a different country than we were. That's what fooled us, because the Siegfried Line was between us.

T: I remember you saying before we began taping, the belief was the plane was west of the Siegfried Line. Therefore in France.

E: Yes.

T: And since you were still in Germany...

E: That's right. So then we thought when we did get knocked down, or finally got down and we all parachuted out, finally then when I hit the ground, we were actually [in Germany.] My bombardier and I, we were loose for about five days.

T: You mentioned hitting the ground. But before you hit the ground, as you bail out of this plane at twenty-some thousand feet...

E: Twenty-three thousand we bailed out at.

T: You've got some time to think on the way down.

E: Oh, yes.

T: What was going through your mind as you're heading for the ground realizing that you could very well be a prisoner of war when you get there.

E: They were shooting at us at the same time we were coming down. So in my chute, when I got down to within ground level or whatever, I hit a tree. My parachute went over the top of the tree and I started swinging down to the ground. That's when I busted up my leg.

T: Did you break your ankle or leg?

E: Yes. I never had a shoe on for six months. All during prison camp. So I turned around and I was going to bury my chute and my jacket and my .45 [caliber pistol]. All of a sudden somebody hollers at me. Over across the way. Here somebody hollers, "Earl!" And here it's my bombardier. So he comes over and he helps me out and everything like that. He and I were together for five days.

T: Doing what?

E: Hiding out. Hiding out and trying to find something to eat and things like that. We got caught being dumb because it was in the afternoon...

T: Did you really think you could get back to Allied lines or were you just...

E: We thought we were. See? Until we found out we weren't. I mean, when we ran into the Siegfried Line we knew darned well we were on the wrong side. Wrong way. So finally then we went...then we got caught being dumb because we got thirsty. We saw a creek and we were going to go down and get a drink and we got halfway between where we were hiding and to the crick and then Jerry found us. Or Jerry got us.

T: Talk about that moment of actually being captured. You've got a German with a weapon.

**(1, A, 85)**

E: The big thing was that the German that caught us, he protected us for the simple reason is the women and kids were after us with hoes and axes and things like that.

T: Were you near a small town or farming village or...

E: A village. Then as they took us in finally, into the town square, the old German took us in there and he held them off with a sawed-off shotgun.

T: Was he in uniform?

E: No. He was a farmer. And he turned around and he took us into the town square where he turned us over to the Gestapo. I'll tell you, it was a privilege for them to turn us over to the Gestapo.

T: So you've got civilians trying to get you.

E: Hitler Youth and villagers.

T: Talk about that. What was that like?

E: Hitler Youth. They were a little like the Boy Scouts in the United States. They had leather pants on. Then they carried long machetes. We called them just corn knives. They turned around and they were after us. But this old fellow with the shotgun, he held them off.

T: What were they doing? You've got youth or women or...what were they doing specifically?

E: They were after us. They were going to get us because they were...see they were the young Germans. Hitler Youth and that. That's what Hitler pushed into their minds. That we were the wrong people and they were the right people as far as that goes.

T: What's going through your mind at that moment when you've got these civilians and your best guarantee of safety was a German?

E: We didn't think that we'd ever get back to...I didn't think we'd ever get back to Minnesota again.

T: So from being this crew member who thought you were always going to get back to base...

E: That's right.

T: Suddenly you don't think you're going to make it in this particular situation.

E: That's right. Yes. He was in the same situation I was.

T: So you were in a sense, it sounds like, you were saved by a German civilian...

E: That's right.

T: From other German civilians.

E: Yes. That's right. The thing was, we were priority. Any airmen were priority. They figured that...and those Germans had it in them. The old German. The young German didn't. The young German, they were out for blood.

T: What kind of condition was your leg in by now?

E: It was in bad shape.

T: Could you walk at all?

E: Not very much. The bombardier, he went and stole a bicycle. I rode a bicycle and then he'd buck me on the bicycle. Give me a ride. When we were loose. But that day, because I couldn't pedal it, I could pedal it with one foot and that was it. Then we got caught. We were thirsty so we were going to get a drink. That was when the German, the old German that caught us, he was...he had a sawed-off shotgun about so long.

**(1, A, 122)**

T: A couple feet long.

E: And he turned around and he was looking at you and looking over here at the same time. That's how cross-eyed he was. But he was the one that saved us. It was



a big honor for him to turn us in to the Gestapo and then we went through interrogation and everything like that.

T: What kind of...when he turned you over to German officials there in this little village...

E: Yes.

T: Were you asked any questions initially there or were you transported to another facility first?

E: No. They tried to, but all we could do was give them name, rank, and serial number. That was the way we were supposed to do it. So they put them in. That was at Mannheim. Then we turned around and then they put us in the Mannheim Prison and each one in a cell.

T: Just you and your bombardier.

E: No. Us separate.

T: But initially it was just the two of you that got turned over to German officials.

E: Oh, yes. Yes. That's right. Then finally, when we got through the interrogation, I finally saw my pilot. All the enlisted men went to Stalag IV and all of the officers, they went to Barth [Stalag Luft] I.

T: That's right. Luft I. Yes, on the coast.

E: So that was the way they went and they separated us.

T: The interrogation. You moved from Mannheim jail to Dulag Luft. Did they take you to Dulag Luft?

E: Yes. They put us on railroad cars and then we went in there. When we got into the railroad station in Mannheim they turned around and they...they had some of our Air Force guys hanging on the light post.

T: Really?

E: Yes.

T: This is at Mannheim.

E: In Mannheim. Yes. When we went into the railroad station there.

T: So guys that had been lynched.



E: Yes. Yes. That's the way they were. The Gestapo were one and your SS troops were another one and everything like that. We had a Big Stoop that was seven foot tall and he had feet like this.

T: Where was this guy? At Luft IV?

E: Yes. He was at Luft IV. Then when we went through interrogation.

T: At Luft IV.

E: Yes. No.

T: At Dulag Luft.

E: Yes. Before we got to...we went to interrogation there. He kicked me from twice the length of this room. He kicked me and I couldn't walk hardly. I had a crucifix and a dog tag around my neck, and he started twisting it. He saw it. We were stark naked.

T: Now for the record, where was this taking place?

(1, A, 160)

E: That was at...when we got interrogated.

T: Where?

E: Before we got...after we got captured.

T: So is this at Mannheim or Dulag Luft or Luft IV?

E: It's at Luft IV.

T: Let me ask about the interrogation at the Dulag Luft facility there at Wetzlar

E: You didn't do too much. You didn't get too much. They were moving us. It was in that edge of the war that they were moving you pretty fast. Because they didn't have the facilities to keep you. From the time we got captured until the time we got into Mannheim, into prison there, and the time we got on the train at Mannheim and started for Stalag IV, that's where we were. Then we were on the two and half mile bayonet march up to the camp.

T: At Luft IV.

E: Luft IV. Yes.

T: Now you were transported by train from Mannheim to Luft IV.

E: Yes.

T: That's a pretty long distance on the map.

E: Yes.

T: What do you remember about being transported? Was it passenger train or boxcars?

E: Boxcar and passenger train. Both of them.

T: So you rode in different cars at different times.

E: Yes. Yes. Yes. That's right. Well, it depended on where the rail yards got shot out and how they could go and everything like that.

T: So you were moved from one car to another.

E: Yes. Yes. That's right.

T: What do you remember about that train trip? What's an image that sticks out in your mind?

E: They packed us in there just like the forty and eight. In the Legion deal they've got forty and eight boxcars. That was the way. Forty horses and eighty men. And that's how true it was. You were packed in there pretty darn...and you didn't have any facilities or anything like that.

T: In the boxcar.

E: Yes.

T: Can you estimate how many days and nights you were actually in the boxcar on the way to Luft IV?

E: Long time. I wouldn't say for sure exactly how long. The thing was, they were always unloading you and then loading you and everything else.

T: So you got on and off the boxcar.

E: Yes. They were afraid we were going to get strafed and things like that.

T: Was the train you were on ever strafed or bombed?

E: It was close, but not our car anyway. It was...it's just that they wanted to keep us moving. Then a lot of times they couldn't keep you moving. When you'd get out to go to the can and things like that, a lot of times you didn't have too much time or anything like that to do that.

**(1, A, 206)**

T: You mentioned no facilities on board these trains. What about food and water?

E: Very little. Very little. It was just what you carried yourself.

T: So the Germans didn't...you don't remember being supplied with any food or water?

E: They were supposed to supply you, but you got black bread and then you probably got lard to spread on it if you had it. If they had. Things like that. Most of the time it was just bread. You were lucky if you were the first one to get a cup of water or something like that.

T: So water you remember being scarce as well.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: In the boxcars on the way were you together with any members of your crew? People that you knew in other words.

E: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

T: Who was in the boxcar with you that you knew?

E: Roy Brose was. He was my top turret. All our noncoms were in there someplace or other. But most of the time we really didn't get together until we got into Luft IV. I just saw a glimpse of my pilot when we were going through interrogation.

T: So you saw him but...

E: I saw him, and that was it. And I never did see the rest of them at all until the six of us were in Luft IV.

T: The noncommissioned officers.

E: Yes. Yes. All of us were in Luft IV but I never saw the rest of them until after the war was over.

T: Of the six who were in Luft IV with you, how many survived that camp? Did everyone survive?

E: We all did. Yes.

T: So everyone survived the war too? All ten of you?

E: Yes. Yes. We all survived the war. The only one that didn't, out of the whole crew, were the bombardier and the...they passed away early after we got out.

T: After you got out of prison camp.

E: Yes. Yes.

T: But after the war.

E: Yes. Yes.

T: What happened to your bombardier? What happened to him?

E: He passed away in 19...oooh...we used to contact...he used to live in Arkansas. He used to live there and my radioman lived in Iowa. Then my top turret he lived in Missouri so we kept a row going down there all the time.

T: They all survived the war.

E: Yes.

T: But some died soon thereafter.

**(1, A, 248)**

E: Yes. The railroad man—I can't even think of who it was. The navigator. He lived in Michigan and he was the first one. That was Hal Smith. He was the first one to pass away. Then the bombardier was the second one.

T: And you mentioned four are alive today.

E: Yes. Four of us are alive today.

T: This boxcar ride ends, and there's a bit of a walk to the camp.

E: Two and a half miles to the camp.

T: Yes. What do you remember about that?

E: It was a bayonet walk.

T: Describe what that means.

E: Well, bayonet. The guards all had bayonets and then they had police dogs. There was one fellow had over sixty some holes in him. Bayonet holes in him. And he was red from the shoulder blades down to the backs of his knees.

T: How did you experience that march?

E: I got one, two of them next to my spine but nothing fatal. They healed and that was it.

T: What was going on there? Why the aggressive behavior by the German guards? What was that all about?

E: That's the young ones. Young guards. The old guards, the hell with it. That's that, or too bad. Just like when we got liberated and everything else. The old guards got up on the haystack and threw their rifles away and everything like that. But the young guards wouldn't do that. Didn't do that. They were Hitler trained.

T: I see. Younger people.

E: Yes. The younger ones. So that's the way that worked.

T: When you got into the camp...was it daytime or nighttime when you actually got into the camp?

E: Daytime.

T: So it's summertime. Pretty long days.

E: Yes.

T: When you got in there, describe what you saw. What the camp looked like to you.

E: I don't know how to really say it because the thing was...it was a new experience for all of us. We were going to get into someplace where we never figured we'd be and so we turned around and we... We had twenty-four men in a room.

T: Getting into the camp. Do you remember feeling relieved to finally be somewhere that was, in a sense, a...

E: Well, yes. You had protection that way. But the thing was, everything was helter skelter.

T: In the camp.

E: Yes.

**(1, A, 294)**

T: Let me show you something here. Mr. Joswick, let me ask you. At Stalag Luft IV you spent your time you mentioned in the A Lager. How many barracks buildings do you recall being in that particular Lager?

*(both look at map diagram of Stalag Luft IV)*

E: There was all of them. *(counts barracks buildings on diagram)* Let's see, there's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

T: Okay. Ten.

E: *(continues to point to locations on diagram)* Because this here was the kitchen, and the deal here, your recreational hall they call it. This was the pond here, and then these were the latrines here. This was the latrines here.

T: Your particular barracks. How many men to a barracks?

E: Most of the time it was twenty-four men to a room.

T: And how many rooms to a barracks?

E: And there was...I really don't know.

T: More than one room to a barracks.

E: Oh, yes. Yes. There was ten rooms.

T: In other words, big buildings.

E: Yes. Ten rooms. Yes. Because...let's see. There's one, two, three, four—there would be four. There would be an aisle down the center and there were four, yes, four rooms on each side.

T: Of a center hallway.

E: Yes. So then that would be four rooms on each side. So that would be eight.

T: Eight rooms.

E: Eight rooms plus a latrine on the end of the barracks too.

T: On one end, or both ends, that you recall.

E: Both ends. Yes. Yes.

T: In your particular room you remember twenty-four men.

E: Twenty-four men.

T: Was there one to a bunk or more than one to a bunk?

E: One to a bunk. No. Well, the bunks were four high.

T: Three high or four high?

E: Four high.

T: Four high. So six stacks of bunks, in a sense, around the room?

E: Yes. Yes. No. Wait a minute. Four high and they were...I mean, they were three high and...let's see. Yes. Three high, and then there were eight bunks. Because there was...the rooms...there were two bunks foot to foot.

T: On each side of a square room.

E: Yes. On each side. And there would be eight...how the hell was it now? Now I can't remember even. Then there was two...like two on this...the window side there wasn't any (*using hand motions*). But then there was on this side and on this side, and then on this side, and then there was a door in the middle that went to the hall. But on this side your bunk headed up to it. Now let's see. That would have been...so there would be six. Six bunks.

T: Times three or times four?

E: Times four.

**(1, A, 364)**

T: For twenty-four. Because one side of the room had no bunks on it.

E: That's right.

T: The guys that you were in the room with, did you know any of them beforehand?

E: Just the one I was with. My top turret. Roy. Roy was with me.



T: Were you assigned to a room or did you kind of pick your own when you got there?

E: I don't remember. I won't say.

**End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.**

T: There were bunks. What do you remember about the bunks themselves?

E: All they were was a frame and wood slats and excelsior or wood chips for a mattress. Gunnysack.

T: In a gunnysack.

E: Yes.

T: The slats in the bunks, flush together or a space between?

E: Space between. Yes. They were colder than hell.

T: A blanket too, or not?

E: Oh, yes. One blanket apiece.

T: The daily routine. I mean, you spent nearly six months at this camp. What did you do during the day as a POW?

E: We played ball. Most of the time it was trying to keep ourselves halfway clean. Like when it got wintertime, then it was rough.

T: Meaning what? Keeping clean, you mean?

E: Keeping clean and everything like that. Because it was so damn cold. See that was the coldest winter that Germany ever had. When we were there. So that was...then we were on the march.

T: The challenges of keeping clean. What do you mean specifically about that? What bothered you the most?

E: Like toothpaste and stuff like that. You didn't have toothpaste. You had some—maybe salt was about the easiest way to take care of your gums and everything. With salt. You hardly ever had toothpaste.

T: Did you have a toothbrush?

E: Yes. You had a toothbrush. You could get a toothbrush. Not too doggoned much and...well, the big thing was you were worried about lice and stuff like that.

T: How much of a problem were lice for you?

E: For me personally, none. But some of them it was bad.

T: So you weren't bothered, that you remember, by lice or fleas or any of those things.

E: No. I wasn't. I wasn't actually. But the thing was, is I think what was the advantage to me is because I went to the—with my leg—I went to the infirmary.

T: How were the conditions there? Better or worse than the standard barracks?

**(1, B, 411)**

E: It was quite a bit better. You got so much attention, but you didn't get enough attention.

T: What condition was your leg in when you arrived at the camp?

E: Bad. Bad.

T: Did you have broken bones?

E: Yes. All they did was wrapped it in paper. Then they put this cold stuff on it. That was it. That's the way it healed. Then when I got home, then I had to have it redone. I've been good. I can't complain. But the thing was that we were youngsters too. That was the big thing. If we would have been older, like now, if I'd break a leg, well, it would probably take five years for it to...

T: Wrap it in paper and put cold water on it wouldn't help...

E: That's right. That's right. That's the whole thing.

T: In the infirmary, how long did you stay there?

E: In the infirmary? I never stayed in the infirmary.

T: But you visited, but never stayed.

E: Yes. Yes.

T: Did they give you any medical attention, besides the wrapping, at all for your leg?

E: No. No. Nothing. Nothing.

T: So by the time the camp was evacuated, February 1945, what condition was your leg in then?

E: It was pretty good. It was bad. It healed, but it didn't heal good.

T: So you could walk, but with some difficulty.

E: Yes. Yes. That's right. The truth is, you didn't worry too much about it.

T: Why not?

E: You never do worry at that time. You worried about...mostly what...I think all of us were thinking of is, are we going to make it home, or what's going to happen? A different day every year. I mean a different day. Every time you turned around it was different.

T: I was going to ask you that. I mean, here you've got a lot of time on your hands. Plenty it looks like.

E: Oh, yes.

T: How much did you think about what's going to happen?

E: Well, that's it. That's it. We didn't know. It's just like when we'd play cards at night. We had blackout shutters, and they went on at four o'clock. So we'd turn around and we'd put the blackout shutters on at four o'clock. Then the lights were supposed to be out too. When it got dark. And then if we didn't have the lights out, they'd shoot at us.

T: In the barracks.

E: From the towers. Yes. So we turned around and we'd go and we'd say, the heck with that noise. We'd go and we'd play cards under the table, with our candles. We made candles out of the oleo margarine that we'd get, and we'd put candles under the tables, and we'd play cards under the table instead of on top of the table. And things like that.

T: So there were ways to keep yourself busy.

**(1, B, 444)**

E: That's it. That's it. We always had experiences...a little bit different from you and me. That's actually what kept us going. But the old guy upstairs, he protected us.

T: Was boredom a problem or just something you dealt with?

E: I don't think it was. I don't think it was a problem, because I think the big thing was it takes a lot to break down a Yank. And that was the biggest quote that you'd ever have. You had to go a long ways to break down a Yank.

T: So it sounds like you depended on each other for moral support in a way.

E: That's it. That's the thing. I got buddies that were buddies from the day we met, probably when we were in Basic Training. It's the same way. It's just like our 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force deal now that we got our lunch. You don't hear anybody complaining. They can't figure it out at the American Legion there where we have it. The Bloomington American Legion. They can't believe it. The way we are there. The whole bunch. We got everybody there. But you don't hear that. You don't hear that.

T: The complaining.

E: We don't...nobody complains.

T: Are you saying you didn't hear people complaining when you were in prison camp either?

E: No. Not really. Because we were all in the same boat.

T: It wasn't a very good boat though.

E: No. It wasn't. But the whole thing is I think we got...if anything I learned during the service I was in, I think that's what we learned—that we could be together. Stay together. And still kid about it and everything like that. And if you haven't got a sense of humor, well then you might as well give up.

T: Did you have a sense of humor then too, Mr. Joswick?

E: I think so. I think I did. We kid about it now. People kid about it with me and I kid about it the same way. I just wish to hell you were in it. That's the way I tell them. Like you will come out to me and you will say, what the heck did you do in prison camp? I wasn't there. Then what would you do about it? That's the whole thing, what you gotta do. I'd have been gone a long time ago I think, if I went and had a different attitude.

T: So keeping a sense of, not a sense of humor, but a positive, a more optimistic sense of looking at the world?

E: Yes. That's right. That's right.

T: Were there guys around you who were not so optimistic?

E: Oh, yes. Yes. There were. We sent one home. From our camp. We got him sent home through Geneva.

T: Repatriated.

E: Yes.

T: What was the matter with that guy?

E: He'd go and he'd have a table knife sitting on the counter or sitting on the table and he'd go nuts. He'd just go out of his head. Because that table knife meant that somebody could kill somebody with it or something like that. He picked it up and he'd go crazy.

T: An American guy?

**(1, B, 485)**

E: Yes. So we finally...we got him sent back. [Dr.] Leslie Caplan was one of them that finally got him out of there. That poor guy. He was just out of it.

T: But that was more the exception than the rule, by what you're saying.

E: Well, yes.

T: Guys like that.

E: Yes.

T: Who couldn't handle it.

E: That's right. That's right. But there's all kinds of people that can't accept it. But there's a lot of them that it doesn't come forward with, but it shows up later on.

T: Afterwards you mean?

E: That's right.

T: It sounds like you mean guys that were internalizing things and then...

E: Yes. That's right.

T: Now you mentioned, actually we saw a photograph too from the camp at the time, of guys playing softball.

E: Yes.

T: Was that something you'd actually do while you were in there?

E: Yes. Yes. We could do that. I'll tell you what we used to do. We'd go and we'd play ball. They had the ten foot fences around the inside of the fence that was out of bounds. We'd throw them in there for the hell of it.

T: The balls.

E: Yes. And we'd dare them to shoot at us and stuff like that.

T: That's pretty risky.

E: We were devils. I mean, that's the way it was.

T: How else did you pass your time during the day?

E: We played cards a lot and things like that. You walked a lot. We'd walk the compound all the time. A lot of times. I think mostly was the suspense of the thing. What's going to happen tomorrow? Or what's going to happen this afternoon, or something like that.

T: So you were thinking about it, but I hear you saying you weren't worrying about it.

E: No. But see, that was the big deal was that we were youngsters. We were young guys. That was the whole thing.

T: Now you mentioned wondering what's going to happen next. Were rumors a part of camp life? Rumors. Rumors about what's happening or what might happen.

E: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. There was. It was just like when the planes would come over. Some of them would daredevil out there. You weren't supposed to be out there waving at them or nothing like that. We were out there waving at them anyway.

T: So you could see Allied planes coming over, American or Russian?

E: Yes. We'd take the chance. Our Yanks or our guys...we pulled things like that. But that's what kept us going. And truthfully about it, we were more or less instructed that way.

T: What do you mean?

E: I mean when we went in the service. We didn't get all the training and everything like they do nowadays. They probably get two years or three years training before they ever find out what they're going to be doing. But we didn't get that chance.

**(1, B, 523)**

T: Your training was a lot faster than that, wasn't it?

E: That's right. That's right. That's the big thing. A lot of people don't realize that. Our world back then was so much different than our world is today.

T: That's for sure.

E: That's the big deal. That's why it's so hard for us a lot of times to communicate with the world today comparing to what it was back then.

T: There's generational change for sure.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: Let me move on to food. What kind of food was provided by the Germans on a daily basis?

E: Soup and black bread and lard for spread. We were supposed to get Red Cross parcels, but we got very seldom Red Cross parcels.

T: So you do remember getting them but not very often.

E: That's right. In fourteen months, just like my mother and my wife, my girlfriend then, they sent me Red Cross parcels, sent us Red Cross parcels with food in and everything like that. Out of the fourteen months, I got two.

T: So you were a POW from July until May.

E: Yes.

T: Ten months and you saw two things come in the mail to you.

E: Yes. We got two. But then the food over there...they used to bring the bread in a horse and wagon.

T: The loaves you mean.

E: The loaves, and then they'd cover them with sawdust.

T: Were the loaves delivered to your barracks?



E: No. They were delivered to the main building here.

T: The food.

E: Yes.

T: Commissary really, but...

E: Kitchen.

T: Distribution area.

E: Yes. But they had it there and then we'd have to go get it.

T: At the main center.

E: Yes. And then they'd turn around and then they had big vats that they used to cook the soup in.

T: So you would take a big vat of soup back to your particular barracks.

E: Yes.

T: When you picked the food up...

E: You usually got a pail of soup or something like that.

T: I see. Now was a certain person assigned to go pick it up or did that job rotate?

**(1, B, 551)**

E: It rotated. Yes.

T: Sometimes you did it too.

E: Yes. All of us. That was keeping us sane.

T: Given something to do, you mean.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: What do you remember about the soup? What kind of soup was it?

E: Water (*chuckles*).

T: So we're talking thin soup, in other words.

E: Yes. Rutabagas and things like that. It was just like when we were out on the road. They strafed and killed a colt. A horse. So we had fresh horse meat.

T: Got it. So you took what you could get, it sounds like.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: Soup.

E: See, the Germans didn't have nothing themselves.

T: That's right.

E: So they weren't going to give us nothing. But like the Red Cross parcels, they'd go and they'd steal them faster than we'd get them.

T: So you remember getting them. Now, when you got one, was it yours or yours to share with a number of guys?

E: It just depends. Like when we got...14 February 1945 we slept out in a plowed field all night, and it rained all night. And it snowed, and it done everything. We got up in the morning. We picked up our Jerry blankets. We shook them out and when we got through, all we had was a rope in our hands. They all fell apart. So we were supposed to get Red Cross parcel apiece. We got eight men on a Red Cross parcel.

T: So you had to split the stuff up somehow.

E: Yes.

T: Was that the same way in the camp too when you got them? You were splitting them up with a number of guys?

E: Sometimes yes and sometimes no. They'd say we didn't get any. Geneva didn't come through. The Red Cross didn't come through. But what they did is they were stealing them. More than that.

T: The soup. Do you remember getting the soup daily?

E: Oh, yes. Daily would mean probably once a day.

T: Right. But it came every day.

E: Yes. Yes.

T: And in the morning. What did you get in the morning?

E: Hardly anything.

T: Any ersatz coffee or...bread or...

E: Yes. Coffee if they...but most of the time we had the coffee that we had ourselves.

T: From the Red Cross packages.

E: Yes. From the Red Cross parcel.

T: Were you a smoker in those days?

E: I was, but I never smoked. I traded them.

**(1, B, 581)**

T: What were cigarettes good for?

E: Anything. Anything and everything.

T: So they were currency it sounds like.

E: Yes. I never smoked a darned bit until I got out of the service.

T: You're kidding.

E: Yes. I never smoked a cigarette. And then I got out of the service and then I went and I started smoking. Then all of a sudden here...well, it's over forty years ago. I haven't smoked since.

T: So as a non-smoker in the camp, what do you remember trading cigarettes for?

E: Chocolate. Chocolate and...see everything was concentrated. That you got. So like if you got chocolate, chocolate could last you a long time.

T: Sure. It's good energy food too.

E: Yes. So that was the main action. The main thing. Anything that you could possibly get. Then we'd take cigarettes and we played cards. Play poker. For cigarettes.

T: It really was a currency, wasn't it?

E: Oh, yes.

T: There were German guards here at the camp. How closely did you interact with those German guards?

E: The old ones, great.

T: Did you actually see them or talk to them or...

E: You could talk to them, yes. But the younger ones, they thought they were God's gift. The Fuhrer. The Fuhrer. That was all they were saying.

T: More than once you've drawn a distinction between people, younger guys and older guys, as far as the treatment you got.

E: Oh, yes. Yes. That's right. It was. We had a guy what they called Bayonet Joe. He was a little guy. About this big. But he always had a rifle with a bayonet on it. He was a younger guy. He was a bastard. Just like that Big Stoop was the same way. He was a younger guy.

T: And Big Stoop was a big guy you said.

E: Yes. He was an SS trooper. Little Joe, he was a little guy, but he was the one that was always the instigator. That type of guy.

T: You mentioned you were, earlier, that you were mistreated by the Germans at the camp here. Is that right?

E: Yes. That was Big Stoop.

T: And what prompted that mistreatment that you got from this guard?

E: He was a younger one, and he was that type of fellow that he'd try to kick you around all the time. Like he kicked me on there (*points to leg*) and I had my busted up leg and everything like that. He saw that crucifix and my dog tags around my neck and right away, "You swine," and cussing me up and down in German to beat the band and everything like that. When it broke, then he threw it on the floor. Then what spited him more than anything is after he gave me a kick, I came back and I picked up my dog tags and I picked up my crucifix again, and I turned around and all the time that this is going on I had my watch and my ring in my hand and he never got them. But he was still...that's the kind of guy he was.

**(1, B, 629)**

T: What prompted this treatment from him? Did this happen in your barracks?

E: No. No. In interrogation.

T: When you first got there.

E: Yes. When I first got there. We were hit. We were always Roosevelt's gangsters. Our Air Force. We were always his gangsters. That's why they wanted so-called revenge. They figured that that's what it was, and we were all alike.

T: I see. Was there another occasion when you were physically mistreated by a guard or was that the only time that you had that happen to you?

E: The only time [was] when we got the bayonets.

T: I mean in camp.

E: Yes. Yes.

T: It sounds like you were safer in camp than...

E: Oh, yes. We were. We were. The whole thing was they didn't know for sure when our confidence men and them would be coming around. They didn't want anything being witness by that. That's the way they work. They sensed it.

T: That's interesting. I want to move on to when the camp was evacuated, but I want to close out the time at camp here with a couple questions. You mentioned having a crucifix on. Were you a religious person at the time?

E: My grandmother gave us all a crucifix when we went in the service. My brothers and everybody. And she came there and she always preached to us. Don't get politics and religion mixed together. She always said that to us kids. So we got this crucifix.

T: And you wore it with your dog tags.

E: I wore it right on my chain with my dog tags. All the time. My brother did. All of us did. My cousins did. Anybody that went in the service. We got that crucifix.

T: Were you a particularly religious person then or...

E: Yes and no. But the thing was still, just like I always say, the old man, he kept me going.

T: Did you think that at the time or is that something you think about now?

E: Oh, we had our deals every day. I mean we had something. Like when we went on a mission. We'd get communion. And the whole crew got communion. And a lot of them...and I think there were four of us that were Catholic. But the rest of them

were other. But we still got communion. All four of us. When we left for a mission. In England.

T: So it sounds like religion was important to you before.

E: It was. Let's say it this way. It was something to do. Nine times out of ten I think everybody does end up that way because there's something there that eases your mind for other things. I think that's the whole thing.

**(1, B, 681)**

T: Do you think that worked the same way for you as a POW in camp then too? Sort of as a way of...

E: Yes. We'd do our own thing. We had the English padre there and different ones over there. But they still...we all were treated the same way. Regardless of religion. Because some of them were Protestant and some of them were Russian and everything like that. I think we all got our religion...is practically the same.

T: Do you remember services, regular services, at camp?

E: We did have sometimes. Yes. I remember when they gave us communion and they went and they cut up a slice of bread and gave us communion that way. And probably orange juice for the wine.

T: Because they weren't going to give you wine, were they?

E: No. That's right.

T: So you remember services, and those were something that you attended sometimes.

E: Oh, yes. We had it. We had it there. In this book here, this fellow, all of these. Jackson lived and Morgan. They were all different. He was...

T: Free English.

E: This fellow here was actually a card.

T: Jackson?

E: Yes. Reverend. Down there.

T: Even though they were British you felt...

E: Yes. They'd come out with it. I think that was over the whole forces then. Back then compared to where it is today. I mean I went a lot of times just to see what it was all about. To go to different Protestant or Catholic or whatever.

T: A sense of curiosity then.

E: That's right. That's right. And it was ease of mind.

T: Did it serve that purpose for you? Did it ease your mind?

E: I think it did. I think it did. A lot.

T: I'm curious. You were shot down after the Americans and British and Canadians invaded France in June. So you knew that the war was moving forward when you were shot down.

E: Oh, yes.

T: When you were in camp, how were able to, or were you able to, sort of follow the progress of the war?

E: We did because we had fellows that built radios. Like we had trading power too, with cigarettes and stuff. We'd get a shortwave radio or something like that.

T: From?

E: From the Germans.

T: So some of these German guards were corrupt enough to trade things like this?

E: Sure. Sure. Yes. So that's how we got a lot of that.

T: So what I hear you saying is that you had some...

E: Communications.

T: Communication or news of how things were going.

**(1, B, 738)**

E: Oh, yes. See that was just like when Roosevelt passed away. We didn't believe it. It's corrupt. We didn't believe it and by golly, then it came out that it was. But they'd come with a lot of that stuff. We were going to be defeated.

T: Yes. Well, it didn't work out for them.



E: No. No. That's the way they were.

T: How much advance warning then did you have that the camp was going to be evacuated? Which happened in early February '45.

E: Hardly any.

T: So you knew the war was getting closer.

E: Yes.

T: Were there rumors about...

E: See the big thing was, we were, Air Force was high priority.

T: For them.

E: Yes. I mean, we were. All they'd ever tell us is that they were going to trade us.

T: They told you that?

E: They were going to trade. They were keeping us going and moving and everything because we're going to be traded, see? But it never worked out that way.

T: Were there rumors in camp about any kind of evacuation before it happened that you remember?

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.**

T: So what you were saying, Earl, is the evacuation of the camp, which was in February 1945, came as a real surprise to the prisoners.

E: Yes. I'm quite sure it did, because all of a sudden...see they'd move us out in different areas, but the thing was, they'd leave the Russians, they'd leave them there. They didn't care about them.

T: Really?

E: They cared about us. Then when we left, we left [at] different times.

T: Like in groups or...

E: Yes. [In groups at] different times.

T: So your whole compound wasn't emptied all at once.

E: Oh, no. Maybe our compound was. But they put us in [groups of] 2500 men. Twenty-five hundred at a time. They figured they could control us better that way.

T: I see.

E: So you'd figure it out. Figure your compound out, and that's what it was about, was around 2500 men. Twenty-eight hundred men. Somewhere in there.

T: So in a sense, you're packing up and taking what with you? What were you able to take with you, for example, when you left?

E: Not much. Not much.

T: What you could carry?

E: Yes. [You took] what you could carry. But then a lot of times you took more than you could carry, so then you let that go too.

**(2, A, 18)**

T: What did you have with you when you walked out the front door?

E: Your blanket and then something to eat. You carried most of the stuff on your back. I mean on yourself. Your coat and stuff like that.

T: So you had, personally, you had your coat. Did you have shoes?

E: Yes. Shoes. Your shoes. You had to be wearing them. That was it.

T: Shoes, coat. Did you have a blanket?

E: Yes. A blanket.

T: Did you have any food with you?

E: Yes. What we had. Probably a half a loaf of bread and stuff like that. But then we were counting on the food that we were going to get on the march. See they had a wagon that they took with us, and that was supposed to have been for the sick. Then they were supposed to have food and stuff on that. We were supposed to get the Red Cross parcels on the way. Then they'd go and they'd steal those.

T: You marched from the beginning of February, the first week of February, through May. About eighty-six days.

E: Yes. A little over five hundred miles.

T: You saw a lot of the German countryside. Maybe more than you would have liked.

E: Oh, yes.

T: On the way.

E: And then we buried fellows too on the way. That was in one of these books.

T: So guys were dying on this march.

E: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: What were the most frequent causes of death as you marched?

E: Malnutrition. That was the biggest deal.

T: So not getting enough food on a daily basis.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: As you left the camp, it's February. It's a cold winter. What did you know about where you were going or...

E: We didn't.

T: So in a sense, you just knew you were walking.

E: That's right.

T: Who were you walking with?

E: My top turret, Roy Brose, was the one that I was with most of the time.

T: So the two of you, did you march with Brose every day?

E: Oh, yes. Yes. We were always together. Then my radioman was with us. My two waist gunners.

T: So on this march you ultimately saw...

E: Yes. You'd see each other all the time.

T: You marched for about eighty-six days. Do you remember walking through any small towns or cities at all where you came into contact with civilians?

E: Most of the time when we walked through towns and everything, the women would come out and they would spit at you and everything like that. They were ready to...but then there were some of them that would hand you things.

**(2, A, 51)**

T: So we have a bad German, good German thing here.

E: Yes. That's right. The older Germans were the good Germans and the younger Germans were the bad ones.

T: So going through little villages and towns, there are times you were spit on or yelled at, other times people slipped you food?

E: Oh, yes. Yes. That happened quite a bit.

T: In your mind, was that a problem to sort of figure out that some of these Germans are good and some aren't good?

E: Truthfully about it, you could just about tell by the glance. The ones that were the good ones would come right out but the other ones would kind of stay out in the shadow. That was the whole thing.

T: What did you make of those Germans who were, in a sense, reaching out to you and helping you?

E: They were in the same boat we were in really. Because the whole thing was, they couldn't do too much either. And we couldn't do too much. So I think they were trying to lend a helping hand. That way.

T: This is the first time you've mentioned Germans who have been, in a sense, positive towards you. You've had a lot of negative experiences until now.

E: That's right. But it was just like when we got liberated. The Germans, the old Germans would come there and they'd get up on the haystack. They had those little haystacks. They'd get up on the middle of that and they'd throw their rifle away and they'd throw this away. I got a canteen from Little Joe. I got a belt from Little Joe. I had a rifle that I carried from a German. And I got tired of carrying it. I brought one dish home about this big around.

T: Small. A small dish.

E: Yes. And I got that at home that I brought home. That's the only doggoned thing I got. Because you got tired of carrying it. I had a clock. That was like the White House. And it had diamonds in it. And I carried it and finally gave it to an MP because I got tired of carrying it.

T: I bet you would.

E: Things like that.

T: On the march, Earl, where did you spend the nights? I mean, there aren't buildings big enough to hold...

E: [We usually slept] in a barn or a plowed field.

T: Sometimes inside. Sometimes outside.

E: Yes. Just like 14 February, Valentine's Day 1945. We slept in a plowed field all night. And it rained all night. And it snowed all night. And it did every darned thing. We got up in the morning. Like I say, our blankets. Roy and I were mostly together all the time, so we had two blankets. And that was the way it was. We shook them out and all we had was the rope in our hand.

T: So they kind of disintegrated?

E: They all fell apart. But that's the way they were made. It was woven wide apart. It wasn't really a blanket. All it was—keep the sun off your head.

T: You had cold weather along this too.

E: The coldest winter that Germany ever had. You can look back in history and you'll see the same thing. We were only twenty miles south of the Baltic Sea. That's damn cold up there.

**(2, A, 87)**

T: The wind blows off the ocean.

E: That's right.

T: How about food during the day? The Germans are supplying...

E: Anything. We'd get into a barnyard or something like that. We'd go and we'd get into the potato pile. They used to take the potatoes and they'd pile them in piles and they'd cover them with dirt. That's the way they kept them in the wintertime. Well, we'd find them. By the time we got through with it, there was half a pile of potatoes.

T: You scrounged what you could.

E: Yes. Then we'd go and pack our pockets full and everything like that. A raw potato wasn't a lot, but it was still something. And rutabagas the same way. Things

like that. Just like the day that the colt got, at the farmyard, got strafed and so we went and turned around and we had horse stew.

T: Because the horse was killed by the strafing plane.

E: Yes.

T: Could you cook?

E: They had those big vats in the barns. The dairy barns. So we went and used them.

T: It sounds, really, like an ad hoc existence. You sort of made do with what you found or scrounged in a day.

E: That was the whole thing.

T: You mentioned strafing a moment ago. How often did that happen that your column was strafed by Allied planes?

E: Not very. Very seldom. We were about three times. But the thing was, the minute we'd go for the ditch. Nine times out of ten they were pretty good. Our planes would keep themselves pretty much so they knew where we were and what the deal was.

T: So you saw Allied planes more often than they strafed you.

E: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: Can you recall and describe one of the times when your column was strafed? How did that happen and what was that like?

E: It was all trees and we were going down the road through the trees and all of a sudden they came. They were coming. So we got a chance to run into the side and nobody got hurt. I mean nobody got strafed, but they did strafe.

T: But they didn't hit anybody.

E: They didn't hit anybody. No. We were lucky that way. They knew approximately where we were and everything like that. They were pretty much on it.

T: Almost like they were monitoring where you were.

E: Yes. That's about it. It worked out real well.

T: You didn't get hit, which is the primary thing.

E: That's right.

T: The German guards along the way. A mix of older guys and younger guys?

E: Yes. See we were instructed and we raised so much Cain because the more Cain...one time in prison camp we had one guard for just about every ten men in camp.

**(2, A, 124)**

T: That's a lot of guys.

E: Because we raised so much Cain, because see, every time we did that they'd take the men off the front line. That was the strategy.

T: The more guards you had, the fewer soldiers they had on the lines.

E: That's right. So that was the main idea.

T: How about when you were marching? Were there a lot of guards along the way?

E: There were a lot of guards, but then they had a lot of dogs and they had a lot of bayonets.

T: On this eighty-six day march would you say the guards mistreated the prisoners or just sort of walked along with you?

E: They kept everybody in line. That was the whole thing. When somebody was sick or something like that, then we had the wagon. But the thing was, they were still pushy. They kept us going all the time.

T: Were they on you personally or were they at a distance?

E: It depended. Every day was different it seemed like. One day they'd be on your group and the next day they'd be on the next group and things like that. They didn't like lagging.

T: I hear you saying they tried to keep you moving along?

E: Yes. That's right.

T: Did you witness any abuse of prisoners by German guards on this march?

E: Oh, quite a bit. Yes. Quite a bit.



T: For example...

E: That's what I was looking at with this...the ones that died on the way. That was the whole thing. They were the fewer. They were the major deal. They always stressed that.

T: Did you talk to these guards much or...

E: Oh, yes. You could talk to them. Some of them you could but some of them you couldn't. I mean, some of them thought they were always better than you were.

T: Got it.

E: We'd accuse them all the time. We'd call them devils and everything else and swear at them and everything like that. Then they'd come about and they'd say they didn't understand English. They did.

T: You think they did?

E: Oh, yes. They did. You could see it. We had one blond deal in camp when we were in Stalag IV, and he came in there and we'd call him everything under the sun and son of a gun he would turn around and he'd say, "Me no speak English." But finally we broke him down and he finally admitted that he understood every word we said. But I mean, that's the way you go. That's the thing.

T: This march went on for a long time. Was it hard for you to keep your sense of optimism that you described earlier about yourself?

E: I think so. Like I say, the advantage that we had was that we were young.

T: On the march too, you think that was the advantage.

E: Yes. I think that's the main thing. Today it would be altogether different.

T: I should think so.

**(2, A, 164)**

E: It would be altogether different because you've got an ache here and an ache there, but back then you had the ache but still I think everybody made everybody else move. The other guy, this guy here, he's ten steps ahead of you and so he's keeping me going or vice versa. I think that's the main thing. We weren't going to get knocked down regardless of what we were doing. We were going to keep up and we were going to prove that we were the upper race.

T: Almost to spite them.

E: Yes. That's right. I think that was the whole big deal.

T: Did you worry though, as you were marching there, if the war went badly for the Germans what they might do to you?

E: Yes. I think you always thought of that. You always thought of that. Many times. I prayed to beat the band. I didn't think I would ever make it back.

T: On the march there.

E: Yes. On the march, or even when I first got shot down. I didn't think I'd ever be back in Minnesota again.

T: So there were times that you were a little concerned about...

E: That's right. Yes. Then the planes would fly over or something like that and then it was altogether different.

T: So your moods go up and down.

E: Yes.

T: That's interesting.

E: I think that that's what most of us did. All through. And I think we kept each other going.

T: The conclusion I can draw from that is had you been by yourself it might have been a hell of a lot different.

E: That's right.

T: So you were kind of good for each other.

E: When we were in Manheim Prison when we first got captured, we were each in a separate cell. I was there and the next cell my radioman was in. The next cell another one of the fellows was in and the next cell the other fellow was in. You know how we corresponded? We dug a hole with a spoon through the wall so we could talk.

T: So you could communicate with each other.

E: Yes. And my radioman was next to me. He'd come and he'd say to Roy next to him, "Earl's doing good today" or "Roy's doing good today" or something like that. That's how we kept going.

T: That's interesting.

E: For five days.

T: Five days in that prison.

E: Yes.

T: What do you remember about the end of this march? You were liberated by British troops you mentioned.

E: Yes.

T: By Bitterfeld in Germany. Describe that day for us.

E: When they came through we were in Bitterfeld and we were in the camp, I mean in a camp there. All of a sudden the gates opened up and here comes the British troops in. The Germans were in there. The old Germans were. We had mostly the old Germans then. They came and threw their rifles down. That's the day we hung old Big Stoop on the flagpole.

**(2, A, 210)**

T: So he was lynched by the prisoners?

E: Yes.

T: Did you witness that?

E: We took him. Yes. We took the chain of the flagpole and up he went and that was it.

T: Did you feel that was the right thing to do, Mr. Joswick?

E: At the time yes. If I had to do it again, I don't think so.

T: Why not?

E: For the simple reason is that we weren't made up that way. We're not that type of people in this world. But the thing was, he and Little Joe, he was right there, witnessed the same thing and he was altogether different.

T: So it was the kind of person and why it happened that way.

E: That's right. But the way he would treat the prisoners, it was just wild. It didn't make any difference. It wasn't just me. It was everybody.

T: At Bitterfeld, were you in a camp, a semi-permanent location there when the British came?

E: We went into this camp at Bitterfeld there. That's where they came into.

T: How long had you been there before the British arrived?

E: Not even a day.

T: So you just arrived and the British arrived too.

E: Yes.

T: What do you think, in the almost three months you were marching, what was the most difficult aspect of that for you personally?

E: When we first started out, I think was the worst. Because you weren't used to walking. And then the weather. You weren't used to...like me. My leg was pretty sore yet. I don't think you were used to it, but then the weather was the worst thing.

T: The cold.

E: Yes. The cold was. I had a pair of shoes on and a pair of thin socks on. I had a British coat, British overcoat, and that British overcoat you might as well have had this on today.

T: A thin cotton shirt.

E: Yes.

T: So it wasn't giving you much warmth.

E: No. It wasn't. You wouldn't get more because there wasn't any more.

T: It sounds like the challenge was to deal with things the way they were.

E: That's right. That's what you had to do. We were so lucky that we weren't older then. We were younger. You know, yourself, when you were younger, you don't give a darn. You run outside without a coat on and stuff like that. But nowadays you think twice.

T: That's true. What was your personal health like the day that you were liberated? What kind of shape were you in?

E: Pretty darn good shape. I really haven't had a lot of health problems.

**(2, A, 254)**

T: Even during the march? When the march ended you were in pretty good shape?

E: Yes.

T: Did you lose some weight?

E: Oh, yes. I was 168 pounds when I got shot down. I was 98 when I got out.

T: So you were skin and bones.

E: Yes.

T: Were you suffering from dysentery or anything like that?

E: No. I think truthfully about it, most of the time you had to regulate yourself. You couldn't tell me and I couldn't tell you.

T: On the march there.

E: Yes. Anywhere. But you always thought of each other. Didn't make any difference. You saw a complete stranger and you still thought he was one of you. That was the whole thing.

T: That's interesting. Let me move ahead. You got back to the States after some time. Were you in France at Camp Lucky Strike or one of those?

E: Yes. We got back to Lucky Strike and then we came home.

T: On a ship? Were you shipped out?

E: Yes.

T: When you got back to the States here, your folks were still alive, right?

E: Yes.

T: When you first saw your folks, when was that after you got back? Pretty soon?

E: Yes. I got home in...now, I can't even think when I got home. I got home in November.

T: Correction. June. Now when you first saw your folks, did you see them pretty much after you got back to the States? Did you come to Minneapolis to see them?

E: Oh, yes. First we landed in [Camp] Shanks, New York, and we were there from...we were only there a short time. Then we came home and we were home for sixty days. Then we went down to Florida. For recuperation.

T: So you had sixty days, in a sense, to see family and friends and stuff.

E: Yes. Then we turned around and we went to Florida. Then I got so sick that I came back and I went up to South Dakota.

T: When you first saw your folks when you got back, how much did your folks want to know about your POW experience?

E: They wanted to know everything, but the thing was, is we didn't talk about it.

T: Why is that? They wanted to know?

**(2, A, 295)**

E: They wanted to know. They knew you went through something, but at that day and our ages and our life and everything else, we didn't talk about it.

T: Now is that because they weren't asking questions or that you weren't talking about it?

E: We weren't talking about it. Back then, we weren't talking about it. My folks didn't know anything exactly what I went through.

T: Did they not ask or did you not tell?

E: We didn't talk about it.

T: It never came up?

E: No. It didn't. You were home and I think you were so darned happy to be home and everything, but you didn't talk about it. Like I said, my dad passed away in '82 and mother passed away in '88, and we never talked about it. And I'm sorry that I didn't.

T: Yes.

E: But that was the whole thing.

T: Part of this was you had been on thirteen combat missions too. Is that something that came up in conversation with you and your folks?

E: No. It didn't either. That was the whole thing. There was so many...we were actually all in the same boat.

T: How so?

E: The rest of my crew and everything like that. They say the same thing I do—it wasn't talked about. We had more information among ourselves than we did with our folks.

T: Now you had two brothers in service, right?

E: Yes.

T: Were they in service during the war?

E: Yes. One got killed after the war.

T: Right. '47 you said, right?

E: Yes.

T: When you saw your brothers after the war, one died in '47. That's still two years though, and your other brother. As veterans, did you talk to each other about your service experiences?

E: My younger brother yes. He was in the Marines. Because we always used to razz each other about I was in the Air Force, he was in the Marines.

T: So light banter in a way.

E: Yes.

T: How about the serious stuff? I was a POW. Here's what happened to me.

E: They know of it, and that's about it. They're always asking questions about it. My brother still does. I'll tell you who asked more questions than anything is my grandson.

T: Let me back up two generations here. Let me ask about your wife. You knew Florence before you went overseas?

**(2, A, 344)**

E: Oh, yes.

T: You and Florence were married in '46?

E: Yes.

T: Your wife, a person close to you, how much did she ask and how much did you tell about the POW experience?

E: She didn't think much of it at all. Over the years. And a lot of wives are the same way.

T: She knew you were.

E: Yes.

T: Did she not ask or did you not tell?

E: We didn't talk about it.

T: Similar to like your folks you mean?

E: Yes. It's similar. That same way. But I was the only one in my wife's side and my side that was a prisoner of war, and I was the only one on my wife's side that was in the service.

T: So there was no one to really talk to about it.

E: That's the whole deal.

T: It sounds like here's this experience that everybody knows about, you, your wife, your folks, and yet, it's almost like a box that sits on the shelf unopened. Everybody knows the box is there. No one opens it.

E: You're right. You're right. You're right. And that's what saddens me is that I never said anything to my mother and dad.

T: And they died in the 1980s.

E: Yes. That's what saddens me. That's why...with my grandson now and my son too –

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.**

T: What about your son? What year was he born?



E: '58.

T: Same year as me. He's forty-six years old.

E: Yes.

T: How much did he ask you about growing up?

E: He's always asking a lot. We go on the computer. That was just like he went on the computer and he found out about Barth, the one where my officers were. Stalag Luft IV. About where I was. My name is on there and everything else. And that intrigued the heck out of him. And then my grandson, right away, "Grandpa, I didn't know that."

T: How old is your grandson?

E: Twelve.

T: Now, when your son was growing up asking you questions, how did you respond to him?

E: It was altogether different there too. He wasn't in the service and my brother and them, they weren't around. He was kind of a lone wolf that way.

**(2, B, 396)**

T: Was he easier to talk to for you?

E: Yes. He was.

T: Easier than your folks or your wife?

E: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

T: How do you explain that?

E: I think he learned a little bit when he went to school and college and everything like that. Then he gets out in the world and then he sees something about me, or something about in there, and he won't miss anything about the Fourth of July or something like that. I was only sorry that we didn't get a chance to go to Washington together.

T: Sure.

E: And take my grandson. But he was in school. You can't do it that way.

T: Does your grandson ask you about things now?

E: Oh, yes. He always does. What did you do here? Everything else. And he doesn't miss anything like the parades and stuff like that. Right away. Are you going to be in it?

T: And you find him easy to talk to as well about it?

E: Oh, yes.

T: Now we're having an interview today where you've answered questions openly and honestly. Is this something you could have done twenty years ago?

E: No. No.

T: So there's been a change for you somewhere?

E: Oh, yes. There is. I think it's in every serviceman's mind the same way. It's just like now your Korean and Vietnam are starting, are coming along pretty good. But it takes a lot to do it. I've had a couple fellows from Vietnam...I got them so mad that I thought I was going to get nailed one because I went and I talked that way. He came up to me and he says, "You're the first SOB that ever made me talk that way." Things like that. So that's, truthfully, that's how you've got to take care of people.

T: What brought the change in you? It was twenty years ago you wouldn't have done this interview and now you are. What changed and why?

E: I think other people have done it and I think we want to keep up with each other. I think we want to do it. We want to let it out. And see what the controversy is between now and then. I think that's the main thing.

T: Does it have to do at all with getting older? With realizing...

E: Yes, it is. It's got something to do with getting older because I feel more at ease now going to the school and talking to the kids...

T: You do that too then.

E: Yes. Or talk to the grownups. But you've got to have two ways to do it.

T: That's right.

E: You've got to talk to the kids one way so they understand what it's all about. You talk to the grownups another way. Maybe what they missed or something like that. But the kids, most of the time they think of the glory of it.

T: You're a good corrective to that.

E: Yes. Isn't it? That's the only way I can explain it.

T: On a different subject, when you got back from Europe, what kind of memories or nightmares did you have, dreams, about your POW experience?

**(2, B, 432)**

E: All kinds. All kinds. It seemed like every night I had a different one. Well, sometimes I still have them.

T: You still have them sometimes?

E: Yes. Sometimes I still have them. I don't know. I think it's the time when you've got stress on your mind about something you should have done and you didn't do it, and then you bring it back to when that happened before. I think that that's what it's really all about.

T: That triggers it, you mean.

E: Yes.

T: Are there certain images or certain memories that recur in your dreams, Earl, or have over the years? From the POW time, I mean.

E: That's a kind of hard one. I would say yes and no. That's the way I would say.

T: What kind of images do you remember dreaming about? Things from your POW time. What kind of specific things have you dreamt about?

E: I know the time when I bailed out. When I bailed out, I thought well, doggone it anyway, this is a long jump. Before I went out about a thousand feet. But then this one here was twenty-three [thousand].

T: Is bailing out, does that experience come up in your dreams? The bailing out experience?

E: Well, yes and no. I would say no more often than yes. I think it was when you bailed out, I think that was the prime. That was the prime of my life when I did that. To save myself. And I think that was the whole thing. It was just like, for the longest time there when I made the first jump in Las Vegas I thought, boy, I'm the luckiest SOB ever lived. Because doggone anyway this other guy, he...

T: You had a guy die.

E: Yes. We all were troopers. We all jumped out.

T: That was jump or go down with the plane, wasn't it?

E: Yes. That's it. And nobody had any problems. We all went out. We didn't have to push anybody out or anything else.

T: Is that something...is that experience something that you've dreamt about or had a nightmare about?

E: I don't think so. Not that I can remember.

T: Are there any images, anything from the march or Stalag Luft IV that you've had a nightmare or a dream about since the war?

E: Oh, I got a couple of them.

T: For example?

E: On different times. Like when we were on the bayonet march. I dreamt about that a couple times. I mean that I didn't think I'd—I'm the luckiest devil, I made it home.

T: So that bayonet march was something that's been a nightmare or a dream.

E: Yes. That's right. And I think you're always going to have it. Something like that. For a while there on television, when I would see something on television, that would remind me of it. But I'm pretty much over that.

T: So the dreams or nightmares about your POW time have decreased over the years.

E: Oh, yes.

**(2, B, 471)**

T: But you still do have them sometimes.

E: Oh, yes. You can have them. I think everybody has them some time or other. I've talked to my top turret guy, Roy. I've talked to him. He's religious as could be, and he says, "What the hell did you dream about last night?" And I go, "Wait a minute, Roy!" It's coming out of Roy? What the hell is going on? But that's the way he is. And he says, I did this or I did that. So he does have some times but...and he's so doggone religious that you can't believe it, that he'd even say "hell."

T: Here's a guy that you know real well that says he also has dreams or nightmares about that.

E: Yes. That's right.

T: Things don't always go away.

E: But what I found out is the ones that, like my copilot, he came home and he went right back in the service again. He says, "Nothing bothered me." They were in prison camp, but they never were on the march.

T: At Barth. That's right.

E: Yes. And that's what he tells me all the time. He says, "Hell, I've had a good life."

T: His POW experience was completely different from yours though.

E: That's right. That's the whole thing. So that's the difference between the enlisted man and the officers.

T: Those who march and those who didn't as well.

E: That's right. They didn't even walk out of camp. They hardly walked out of camp.

T: Yes. The Russians found them at the camp. That's right. The last thing I want to ask you is this: what do you think, when you consider your POW experience of just about a year, many years ago now, what would you say is the most important way that experience changed you as a person, Earl?

E: If I compare myself with people that weren't in the service, I think that I'm a little bit more ahead of them than they are ahead of me.

T: Now how's that? What do you mean?

E: The simple reason is that they haven't had the experience. The only way they got the experience is probably through a book or something, where I got it myself. I got it personally. And I went through it.

T: Are you saying, in a sense, that your POW experience was almost a positive or a character building thing for you?

E: Yes and no. The no part of it would be that...well, let's see how you could even say that. Because I wouldn't want to go through it again, but they can't take it away from me what I did go through. That's the big thing. But other people can visualize it, but they can't say it.

T: Sure. Do you think you're better off in any way as a person because of what you went through?

E: Yes, I do. If I didn't go through that, it probably would have been something different altogether and it wouldn't have brought out the character in me or anything like that. I think that would be about the best way that I could explain it.

T: To follow up on that. Do you think when you got back to the States and you saw your folks for the first time or you saw even Florence who would be your wife, do you think they looked at you and thought, "That Earl. He's changed somehow?"

E: Oh, yes. I think so.

**(2, B, 521)**

T: What did they notice?

E: I think my character is changed. I mean more than back then, because you were so much younger and everything else, but you grew up fast.

T: You think this whole POW experience helped you grow up fast.

E: I think it did.

T: You got back, you weren't even twenty-two years old.

E: No.

T: When the whole thing was over with.

E: Yes. That's why I think we did grow up fast. I think our whole World War II deal, we all grew up fast. Faster than if we were growing up nowadays. Compared to that. And I think it's the same way with your deal now.

T: The Iraq thing.

E: Yes. I think these guys are really...I give them one hundred, two hundred percent credit for what they're going through and if they can make it, they make it. Boy, I'll tell you, there's not a bigger honor that they could have in their life. Because boy, lots of them are, they're putting on a lot up there.

T: That's the last question I had, and I want to ask if there's anything you wanted to add about your POW experience that I didn't get to, because I've been doing most of the questions here.

E: I went through it but I sure wouldn't want to go through it again.

T: Amen.

E: That's the way I could say it. But they can't take it away from me.

T: On the record, I'll thank you very much for your time today. Very enjoyable.

E: It's been good. To me it's been super.

T: Thanks, Earl.

E: You can't explain enough.

**END OF INTERVIEW**